

God's Liberating Grace

Anchor command. "This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it." *1 Peter 5:12*

Anchor story. Joseph rescues his family, and shows them grace. *Genesis chapters 37, 39-50.*

Anchor verse. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." *Romans 5:1-2*

Learning goal. Know what Scripture says about God's grace, which cannot be merited; grace can only be given or received.

Growth goal. Appreciate the infinite depth of God's abounding grace.

Skill goal. Convince others that God's grace alone is sufficient.

Outcome goal. The believers are trusting God's grace to save and justify them, rather than counting on their own good works to justify their for God

Basic Study

Our Father in heaven, help us to stand firmly like Jesus, Peter and Paul, who resisted men and traditions that hindered the free flow of your infinite grace.

Learn about grace from the story of Joseph in *Genesis chapters 37, 39-50.* If you do not have time now to read the entire story then you may use the following summary of it. However, you should read the whole story when you can, as it contains valuable and fascinating history.



Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

The Story of Joseph, Summary

Joseph lived in the time of the patriarchs, centuries before God gave Moses Israel's law. The story begins when Joseph tells his brothers, "Listen to my dream, my brothers. I dreamt that I would rule over all of you, my eleven older brothers! That is not all. Look! See the beautiful, multicolored tunic that my father gave me.

Judah tells his other brothers, "It is obvious that our father Jacob favors our youngest brother Joseph. I will think of a way to change that."

Later, Joseph's brothers are out tending the flocks, and Joseph decides to go join them. Judah sees him coming and says, "Look. Here comes that dreamer. Now is our chance. Let us get rid of him!"

The other brothers agree. Judah sees a camel caravan coming, and suggests, "Well, now! Look. That camel caravan is on its way to Egypt. Why kill Joseph? Let's sell him to those merchants. We will put goat's blood on his tunic, and tell Jacob a wild beast killed him."

The caravan carries Joseph to the slave market in Egypt, where Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard, buys him. Potiphar puts Joseph in charge of his estate. Later, while Potiphar is away, his wife coyly tells Joseph to come lie with her. Joseph resisted, and she is livid. She tells Potiphar that Joseph had tried to force her. Potiphar becomes furious and imprisons Joseph.

Sometime later, the prison's steward tells Joseph, "Listen, Pharaoh wants to know the meaning of a scary dream. Joseph, you once interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Come."

Joseph tells Pharaoh, "God revealed to me your dream: You dreamt that seven skinny cows devoured seven fat cows. It means that there will be seven years of plenty, and then seven years of famine." Pharaoh is pleased, and puts me in charge of storing grain.

This terrible famine comes and lasts and lasts. Joseph's father Jacob tells his sons, "We are starving here in Canaan. You will all travel to Egypt and buy grain, so that we will not starve."

Joseph's brothers come to him in Egypt to buy grain, and they do not recognize him. Joseph hides his tears when they speak of their father. He understands their Hebrew speech but questions them through an interpreter. He asks them if they have younger brothers.

Judah replies, "Our younger brother Benjamin stayed at home with our father."

Joseph tells his brothers, "You are spies! I will keep one of you here; the rest can go home with the grain. Return with your brother to prove you told the truth, and I will free the hostage."

The brothers take the grain back to their home, but are surprised to find the money that they had paid for the grain hidden in the sacks; Judah tells his father Jacob, "We must take Benjamin to Egypt to free our brother Simeon whom they hold hostage." Their father Jacob grieves bitterly.

The famine persists. Again the brothers come to Egypt to buy more grain, and they bring their youngest brother Benjamin as Joseph had required. Joseph puts them to a test. He tells his steward. "Fill the Hebrew's sacks with grain, and hide their money in the sacks as you did before. Also, hide this costly silver cup in the sack of Benjamin, the youngest."

When the brothers leave with their donkeys in the morning, Joseph's steward follows them with soldiers, and stops them just outside the city. He orders them, "Open your sacks. One of you stole a priceless silver cup from my master."

Judah exclaims "You are mistaken. We could never do such a thing! Your servants would never rob from your master! With whomever of us you find the cup, let him die and we will all be your slaves."

The steward replies, "He who has the cup will become my slave." He opens their sacks and shouts, "Aha! Here it is, in the youngest one's sack. You, Benjamin, will be my slave."

Judah and his brothers tear their clothes in sorrow. They return and fall down before Joseph crying, "Mercy, Master!"

Joseph says, "Get up! What have you done? After all the kindness I've shown you!"

Judah hangs his head in shame. "What can we say? God found your servants' crime. We are my lord's slaves."

Joseph replies, "We found the thief, Judah. He will be my slave. The rest of you may go in peace."

Judah begs, "Our father has a child of his old age, and you forced us to bring the boy. Our aged father said he'd surely die if he lost his other youngest son, who was torn to pieces by wild beasts."

Joseph asks, "Torn to pieces by beasts? Are you sure, Judah?"

Judah weeps, "I will stay as your slave instead of the lad. I cannot go to my father without him."

Joseph cries out, "Everyone! Leave the room, everyone except these brothers!"

They leave and Joseph is alone with his brothers. He can control himself no longer. He weeps loudly and cries out in the Hebrew language, "I am your brother Joseph!"

The brothers are shocked and speechless. Joseph begs them, "Come close. Come! I am Joseph, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. Do not be angry with yourselves; God sent me before you to preserve life."

Judah cries, "My brother Joseph! You've shown us such mercy!"

Joseph tells him, "Go and bring my father Jacob to Egypt. I will provide good land for all of you." He embraces Benjamin and weeps. Then he embraces all of them. They are forgiven!

Discussion Queries

- Why were Joseph's brothers envious of him? *Gen. 37:2-11*
- What did his brothers do to him because of their envy? *37:17-28*
- What was the lie that they told their father about what happened to Joseph? *37:32-34*
- Why was Joseph imprisoned in Egypt? *39:1-20*
- Why was Joseph raised to position of great power in Egypt? *Chapters 40-41*
- In what way did Joseph force his brothers to return with his youngest brother Benjamin, when they came to him to buy grain? *42:6-20*
- In what ways did Joseph show grace to his brothers who had sold him as a slave?
(Even though his brothers had sold him to be a slave, Joseph forgave them, charged nothing for the grain they got, brought the entire family back together, and gave them good land to live in.)

During the week visit people to whom you or your co-workers can show God's grace by forgiving, asking forgiveness, serving in some way, or simply showing friendship.

During worship summarize the story of Joseph, and ask the above questions; urge the believers to discuss the answers.

- Describe ways in which Joseph resembled Christ :
 - His father loved him in a very special way.
 - God had given him unique prophetic power (to interpret dreams).
 - His own brothers rejected him, just as Jesus was rejected by his people.
 - He was sold for a few pieces of silver.
 - He was punished by the authorities although he was innocent.
 - He was raised from confinement to a place of power at the king’s right hand.
 - He forgave those who had harmed him.
 - He interceded for his brothers.
 - He revealed himself at a banquet.
 - (We will see Jesus’ face at a great feast in glory, Rev. 19:6-9, 1 John 3:2).
 - He gave his brothers a good land to live in.
 - (Jesus provides his brothers an eternal home.)

Ask the children to present what they have prepared.

Memorize together Ephesians 2:8-9.

Advanced Study

1. **Contrast what the New Testament says about God’s grace with what religious tradition says about it.**

The New Testament says	Religious Traditions say
Salvation is by grace through faith. Find in Eph. 2:8-10 whether works result from, or cause our salvation.	“Salvation requires good works. You are unsaved if you do any of the forbidden pleasures on my list.”
Grace is God’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life for undeserving sinners who believe. Find in Rom. 5:8–21 the only source of grace.	“If grace is free, then Christians will think they can do anything they want and will keep sinning.” (Find in Rom. 6:1-14 if this is true.)
God’s goodness leads sinners to repentance, Rom. 2:4. Find in Titus 2:11–15 what grace leads believers to do.	“Religious leaders must enforce strict rules to keep good order, and govern congregations with man-made policies besides the Bible.”
Salvation is by grace through faith. Find in Eph. 2:8-10 whether works result from, or cause our salvation.	“Salvation requires good works. You are unsaved if you do any of the forbidden pleasures on my list.”

2. Plan with co-workers additional activities to do during the week.

Review the above chart. Then go visit believers and shepherds who are enslaved to religious rules, and explain grace to them

3. Plan with co-workers additional, optional activities for the upcoming worship Time.

- Explain ‘**Seven Freedoms**’ from religious traditions. We must exercise these freedoms to enjoy healthy congregational life and allow a widespread movement for Christ.
- Prepare a sign that reads ‘Mr. Tradition’ and ask someone to take his part.
- Explain that ‘Mr. Tradition’ enforces man-made restrictions. He is everywhere!
- After you read each of the seven freedoms, Mr. Tradition will argue with you. Ask the people to correct him.

Seven Freedoms

1) Freedom to do all that Jesus commanded and His apostles practiced.

His commands include assuring believers of God’s free grace and forgiveness, baptizing them without man-made requirements, and celebrating the Lord's Supper wherever believers gather.

- Mr. Tradition shows his sign and argues, in his own words:
“Only ordained clergy can baptize and serve Communion. Baptismal candidates must walk on water to prove they are holy!”
- Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that we obey Jesus before we obey man.
- The first believers in Jerusalem in Acts 2:38-47 began from the beginning to obey Jesus.
- We can summarize His commands in 7 practices that the 3,000 new believers obeyed in Acts 2.
- They repented and received the Holy Spirit, were baptized, ate the Lord's Supper, loved one another as seen in their fellowship, prayed, gave and made disciples.
- Ask what Jesus said in Matt. 28:18–20 that puts His commands above all human rules



Mister Tradition disagrees.

2) Freedom to enter the homes of seekers, evangelizing and starting new congregations in their homes at once, working within their families and cultures.

- Mr. Tradition disagrees.
“Separate new believers immediately from the bad influence of friends! A church must mature for many years before starting another church. It needs approval from our regional office, and enough members to pay the new pastor’s salary.”
- Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that we must work within family networks. Jesus and the apostles often entered homes and ate meals with people. They dealt immediately with the families and friends of seekers. They started new congregations wherever they went without requiring that congregations have buildings or pay salaries.

3) Freedom to serve one another in groups small enough that members can talk with one another (1 Cor. 14:24-26).

- Mr. Tradition disputes:
“We must do all things in decency and order. The order is what I myself say it is! Only educated clergy should lead public meetings.”
- Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that God commands us to serve one another with our different spiritual gifts. We must have freedom to talk and keep groups small enough that everyone can speak.



Members of little gatherings serve one another with their spiritual gifts.

4) Freedom to name leaders who meet God’s requirements, with or without salaries.

- Mr. Tradition argues:
“Our church requires pastors to be ordained. Our policy book lists 734 requirements that they must meet first, including professional academic agrees.”

- Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that Paul named elders to shepherd new congregations and mentored them, Acts 14:23. He told Titus to do the same, Titus 1:5-9.
- 5) **Freedom to work in different ways, without imitating practices of older churches.**
- Mr. Tradition disagrees:
“We must all use the same methods, those that I myself approve. Unity in Christ requires that we conform to the same practices. We must all preach the Word the same way. God requires top quality and excellence in the pulpit.”
 - Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that we may use many methods, as Jesus and the apostles did, and adapt to each group’s size, to their leaders’ maturity and to local customs.
- 6) **Freedom for the trainer of shepherds to respond to the immediate needs of their new flocks.**
- Jesus said that wise teachers offer things old and new, Matthew 13:52. We must offer choices to new leaders so they can choose studies that fit their new flock’s current needs.
 - Mr. Tradition asserts:
“My training program has a standard curriculum. Each student studies the same thing, starting in the same place and following the same path. They will apply it all in the future, after graduation and getting ordained.”
 - Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that Christ taught in response to current situations and immediate needs. Paul told Titus to deal with what was lacking in the new congregations of Crete. New congregations often have different needs.
- 7) **Freedom to provide coordinators like Titus in a region, who will supervise new congregations and train shepherds, as Paul instructed Titus, Titus 1:5.**
- Mr. Tradition argues:
“New congregations should govern themselves, except for the bishop who visits them every five years. If anyone must oversee the new churches, I myself will.”
 - Ask the believers to correct Mr. Tradition. Then explain that new congregations, like new-born babies, have urgent needs and require the help of older congregations and leaders. Paul left Titus in Crete to name shepherding elders in each congregation to deal with what was lacking.
4. **Ask the believers to give testimonies of how God’s forgiving grace has reached them.**